SUNDAY SCHOOL SEPTEMBER 21, 2025

Prayer:

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Old Testament

Psalm 113

GOD THE HELPER OF THE NEEDY

Sung at Passover and other Festivals

Praise the Lord!

Praise, O servants of the Lord;
  praise the name of the Lord.

Blessed be the name of the Lord
  from this time on and forevermore.

From the rising of the sun to its setting,
  the name of the Lord is to be praised.

The Lord is high above all nations
  and his glory above the heavens.

Who is like the Lord our God,
  who is seated on high,
  who looks far down
  on the heavens and the earth?

He raises the poor from the dust
  and lifts the needy from the ash heap,
  to make them sit with princes,
  with the princes of his people.

He gives the barren woman a home,
  making her the joyous mother of children.

Praise the Lord!

OVERVIEW

Psalm 113 opens the "Egyptian Hallel" (Pss 113–118), hymns traditionally sung at Passover and other festivals. It is a compact praise psalm that moves from a call to worship (vv. 1–3), to God's exalted majesty (vv. 4–6), and then to God's tender action for the lowly (vv. 7–9). Its keynote: the Lord is both high above all nations and near enough to lift the poor from the dust and seat them with princes, to give the barren woman a home. In short: God's transcendence and God's mercy belong together.

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Literary setting:** Book V of the Psalter (Pss 107–150). Psalm 113 pairs with Psalm 114 at the start of the Hallel; together they frame Israel's memory of deliverance and God's ongoing care.
- **Use in worship:** In Jewish liturgy, recited at Passover, Shavuot, Sukkot, and other festivals; in many Christian traditions it is used as a call to worship or doxology that leads into the Lord's Supper or festive seasons.
- **Themes and echoes:**
  - **Hannah's song** (1 Sam 2:1–10): the language of lifting the poor and honoring the humble closely parallels Psalm 113:7–8.

- **Exodus memory:** praising God "from the rising of the sun to its setting" (v. 3) universalizes Israel's testimony—what God did for Israel is a sign for all peoples.
- **Name theology:** Praise attaches to God's Name (vv. 1–3), signaling God's revealed character—faithful, merciful, just.

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Likely setting:** Many scholars place Psalm 113 in (or adapted for) the Second Temple period (after 539 BCE). Israel lived under larger empires—Persian, then Greek, later Roman—where God's people were a small community amid great powers.
- **Political undertone:** The psalm quietly subverts imperial pride: God is "high above all nations," not the other way around (v. 4). God's rule is measured not by conquest but by care for the overlooked—poor, childless, socially marginal.
- **Social reality:** Ancient Near Eastern households measured stability by lineage and land. Childlessness threatened the future; poverty threatened survival. Psalm 113 names those exact vulnerabilities as the places where God's compassion breaks in.
- Psalm 113 is **anonymous** in the Hebrew text. Unlike many psalms that carry headings (e.g., "A Psalm of David"), this one begins directly with the call to praise.

  Attribution:

  - **Jewish tradition** doesn't tie Psalm 113 to a particular figure—it's grouped in the **Hallel psalms (113–118)**, used liturgically rather than tied to an individual author.
  - **Christian commentators** also usually treat it as **author unknown**, though some note its similarity to **Hannah's song** in 1 Samuel 2 and suggest it could have originated in that circle of thought.
  - **Scholarly view:** Most agree it was composed for **temple worship**, perhaps during or after the exile, shaped to fit Israel's festival life (Passover, Sukkot, etc.).

  So: while David is traditionally associated with many psalms, Psalm 113 is best understood as **a communal/liturgical composition, anonymous in authorship.**

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Pre-exilic roots:** Its theology echoes early Israelite faith (Exodus deliverance; Hannah's prayer).

See Exilic Addendum.

- **Second Temple shaping:** The Hallel collection crystallized for festival use during and after the exile (6th–5th c. BCE).
- **Liturgical continuity:** By the time of Jesus, Psalms 113–118 were sung at Passover meals—likely the hymns the Gospels mention after the Last Supper (cf. Matt 26:30).

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

- **Transcendence and nearness:** God "stoops to look" (v. 6). Metaphorically, the Creator leans over the balcony of heaven to notice what others ignore. In civic life, that challenges any habit—religious, political, or economic—of overlooking those on the margins.
- **Reversal of fortunes:** "Raises the poor from the dust… seats them with princes" (vv. 7–8). The metaphor is not only personal; it is **structural**. Communities are called to build tables where the excluded share in decision-making, not just in leftovers.

- **Barren to joyful mother (v. 9):** Beyond biology, this creates an image of barren neighborhoods becoming places of life—empty storefronts animated, isolated people folded into households of care.
- **Grant County lens:**
  - **Work & dignity:** In a county with cycles of manufacturing shifts, farm uncertainties, and service-sector pressures, Psalm 113 asks us to measure health not by headlines or output alone, but by whether the most vulnerable are lifted.
  - **Household as community:** The "joyful mother" can picture foster and kinship care, mentoring teens, meal trains for new families, and church programs that turn strangers into relatives.
  - **Tables and princes:** School boards, city councils, church committees, and nonprofit boards can practice the psalm by reserving literal seats for voices seldom heard—clients, line workers, single parents, immigrants, the disabled.
  - **Practical parallels:** Food security efforts, the church's community garden, rides to medical appointments, and partnerships with local charities embody God's stooping care. When we make policy or budget choices that lift people "from the ash heap," we are harmonizing with Psalm 113's melody.

SUMMARY

Psalm 113 summons God's servants to praise God's Name everywhere and always (vv. 1–3). The Lord is exalted above nations and heavens (vv. 4–5), yet bends low to see and to save (v. 6). That divine stooping results in concrete reversals: the poor are raised to dignity and influence, and the childless household becomes a thriving home (vv. 7–9). Historically sung at Israel's great feasts, the psalm proclaims that true greatness is proven by mercy. For today—in Grant County and anywhere—its invitation is clear: worship the Most High by joining God's work of lifting up the least.

Gospel

Luke 16:1-13

THE PARABLE OF THE DISHONEST MANAGER

This Parable follows last week's parables of the Lost Sheep and the Lost Coin

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and charges were brought to him that this man was squandering his property. So, he summoned him and said to him, 'What is this that I hear about you? Give me an accounting of your management because you cannot be my manager any longer.'

"Then the manager said to himself, 'What will I do, now that my master is taking the position away from me? I am not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I have decided what to do so that, when I am dismissed as manager, people may welcome me into their homes.'

"So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he asked the first, 'How much do you owe my master?' He answered, 'A hundred jugs of olive oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, sit down quickly, and make it fifty.'

"Then he asked another, 'And how much do you owe?' He replied, 'A hundred containers of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill and make it eighty.'

"And his master commended the dishonest manager because he had acted shrewdly, for the children of this age are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than are the children of light.

"And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of dishonest wealth so that when it is gone they may welcome you into the eternal homes.

"Whoever is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much, and whoever is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. If, then, you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful with what belongs to another, who will give you what is your own?

"No slave can serve two masters, for a slave will either hate the one and love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."

OVERVIEW

In this passage, Jesus tells a parable about a manager accused of wasting his master's possessions. Facing dismissal, the manager acts shrewdly by reducing debts owed to his master, thereby winning favor with the debtors. Surprisingly, the master commends his shrewdness, not his dishonesty. Jesus then draws lessons about stewardship, faithfulness in small and great matters, and the impossibility of serving both God and wealth (mammon).

BIBLICAL CONTEXT

- **Immediate context:** This parable follows the *Lost Parables* in Luke 15 (the lost sheep, coin, and prodigal son), which emphasize God's grace and the joy of recovery. Now the focus shifts from God's mercy to how disciples handle resources.
- **Audience:** Luke notes that Jesus often addressed both disciples and Pharisees. The disciples needed lessons on faithfulness, while the Pharisees — "lovers of money" (16:14) – act in contrast to Jesus' teachings.
- **Themes:**
  - Stewardship of worldly wealth.
  - Using temporal resources for eternal purposes.
  - Faithfulness in "little things" leading to trust with "true riches."
  - The stark choice between God and mammon (wealth as an idol).

HISTORICAL / NON-BIBLICAL / POLITICAL CONTEXT

- **Debt and economy:** In first-century Judea, wealthy landowners often had managers who oversaw debts, rents, and trade. These managers could inflate or negotiate debts for profit. The amounts listed (100 measures of oil, 100 measures of wheat) represent enormous sums—about 1,000 gallons of oil and 1,000 bushels of wheat—showing large-scale, estate-level dealings.
- **Honor and shame:** The master's commendation was less about morality and more about admiration of cleverness within an honor-shame culture. The manager preserved his future social standing by securing support from the debtors.
- **Roman economic backdrop:** Palestine was under Roman taxation and elite exploitation. Many peasants were crushed by debt, so the debt reduction may have also sounded like an act of mercy—even if self-serving.
- **Religious politics:** Pharisees and other Jewish leaders often tied piety to visible wealth (as a sign of blessing). Jesus directly subverts this by insisting one cannot serve both God and mammon (wealth, riches or property).

HISTORICAL TIMELINE / BIBLICAL TIMEFRAME

- **Setting:** Around AD 30 during Jesus' ministry in Judea and Perea.
- **Placement in Luke:** Part of Luke's "travel narrative" (Luke 9:51–19:27), where Jesus is journeying toward Jerusalem and teaching discipleship ethics.
- **Early Church use:** By the late first century, Luke's Gospel highlighted practical discipleship for a community navigating wealth, poverty, and stewardship in a Greco-Roman context.

SCHOLARLY METAPHORICAL INTERPRETATION WITH MODERN-DAY & GRANT COUNTY CONTEXT

- **Metaphorical reading:** The parable illustrates not dishonesty but shrewd preparedness. The "children of this age" act more decisively than the "children of light." Followers of Christ should be equally wise in using resources for God's kingdom.
- **Faithfulness principle:** Small acts of honesty, generosity, and responsibility matter because they reflect readiness for greater spiritual responsibility.
- **Modern metaphor:** Just as the manager secured his future by "investing" in relationships, Christians today are called to invest not in hoarding but in building communities of trust, generosity, and eternal impact.
- **Modern parallels:**
  - In today's rural Midwest economy (like Grant County, Indiana), people wrestle with stewardship of farms, small businesses, and personal finances. The temptation to "cut corners" for short-term survival resonates with the manager's dilemma.
  - The parable challenges communities where wealth divides neighbors: How are financial resources—whether a farm loan, factory paycheck, or church endowment—used in ways that foster relationships, mercy, and long-term spiritual gain?
  - For churches: managing budgets, land, and outreach programs faithfully matters as much as preaching. The real question: do our financial decisions serve God's purposes or merely preserve institutional security?

SUMMARY

Luke 16:1–13 presents a parable that seems puzzling at first—the dishonest manager is commended for his cleverness. Yet the teaching isn't about dishonesty but about wise, purposeful stewardship. Jesus contrasts the short-term shrewdness of worldly people with the need for disciples to handle wealth faithfully for eternal ends. He warns that one cannot divide loyalty between God and mammon.

For today, especially in communities like Grant County, Indiana, the passage asks: *How do we use what little or much we have? Do we employ our resources—time, money, land, talents—in ways that honor God and strengthen relationships? Or do we serve wealth itself?* The parable presses us to make a clear choice: God or mammon.

Addendum

Prayer & Community Life

Follow up from last Sunday's discussion on praying with others or by ourselves.

The beauty is, both are true—but they speak to **different aspects of prayer and community life**. Here's a way you could frame a response for your class:

1. Acknowledge Both Scriptures

- **Matthew 18:20** — *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them."*
  → This verse highlights the **communal nature** of prayer and discernment. It doesn't mean God isn't present when we're alone, but it affirms the special presence of Christ when believers gather together.
- **Matthew 6:6** — *"But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret."*
  → This verse highlights **personal sincerity** in prayer, contrasting with showy, public religiosity. Jesus is warning against praying to impress others, not against praying in groups.

Scripture isn't contradicting itself here—it's showing us that prayer has different dimensions.

- **Private prayer** keeps us humble and honest before God. It's about intimacy, sincerity, and personal devotion.
- **Shared prayer** reminds us that faith isn't a solo project. We are the body of Christ, and His Spirit dwells among us when we gather.

Think of it like breathing: inhaling (personal prayer, drawing in God's Spirit privately) and exhaling (communal prayer, sharing in God's Spirit with others). Both are essential for spiritual health.

2. Grant County, Indiana Analogy

Let's compare it to farming or community life:

- There are times when you **work alone in the field**—reflecting, focusing, and quietly doing your part.
- But there are also times when the **whole community gathers**—at harvest, at a church dinner, or in crisis. Both forms of work are vital. Prayer works the same way: some moments are private and quiet; others are communal and shared.

Conclusion

Jesus invites us into both kinds of prayer. Sometimes it's just us and God, quietly honest. Other times, it's the community gathered, and Christ promises to be in the midst of us. Neither cancels out the other—they complete one another."

- *Matthew 6:6 = humility and sincerity in private prayer.*
- *Matthew 18:20 = Christ's presence in communal prayer.*

Together, they teach us that prayer is both **personal and shared**—and a healthy faith needs both.

Exilic

Exilic refers to the time when the people of Judah (the Southern Kingdom) were taken into **exile in Babylon** after the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 BCE.

Key points:

- **Exile = forced displacement.** Large portions of the Jewish population were deported to Babylon, while Jerusalem and the Temple lay in ruins.
- **Exilic period = roughly 586–539 BCE.** It began with the destruction of Jerusalem (586 BCE) and ended when Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return (539 BCE).
- **Exilic writings:** Parts of the Bible reflect this period—Lamentations, portions of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, parts of Isaiah (esp. "Second Isaiah" chs. 40–55), and many Psalms. These texts wrestle with despair, hope, and identity without land or temple.
- **Theological significance:**
    - Raised questions: *Has God abandoned us? How do we worship without the Temple?*
    - Birthed new clarity: God is not limited to a land or building; God is everywhere, and the covenant still holds.
- **Post-exilic** refers to the period *after* 539 BCE, when many Jews returned to Jerusalem under Persian rule and began rebuilding (e.g., Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah).

So when you see "exilic" in biblical studies, it basically means **during the Babylonian exile**.